



Summer heat waves bring unusually high temperatures that may last for days or weeks. In the summer of 1980, a severe heat wave hit the United States, and nearly 1,700 people lost their lives from heat-related illness. Each year, high temperatures put people at risk.

People suffer heat-related illness when the body's temperature control system is overloaded. The body normally cools itself by sweating. But under some conditions, sweating just isn't enough. In such cases, a person's body temperature rises rapidly. Very high body temperatures may damage the brain or other vital organs.

Several factors affect the body's ability to cool itself during extremely hot weather. When the humidity is high, sweat will not evaporate as quickly, preventing the body from releasing heat quickly. Other conditions that can limit the ability to regulate temperature include old age, obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, poor circulation, sunburn, and drug and alcohol use.

Summertime activity, whether on the playing field or the construction site, must be balanced with measures that aid the body's cooling mechanisms and prevent heat-related illness. This pamphlet tells how you can prevent, recognize, and cope with heat-related health problems.

## **During Hot Weather**

To protect your health when temperatures are extremely high, remember to keep cool and use common sense. The following tips are important.

### **Drink Plenty of Fluid**

Increase your fluid intake - regardless of your activity level. During heavy exercise in a hot environment, drink 2-4 glasses (16-32 ounces) of cool fluids each hour.

**Caution:** If your doctor has prescribed a fluid-restricted diet or diuretics for you, ask your doctor how much you should drink.

During hot weather, you will need to drink more liquid than your thirst indicates. This is especially true for persons 65 years of age and older who often have a decreased ability to respond to external temperature changes. Drinking plenty of liquids during exercise is especially important. However, avoid very cold beverages because they can cause stomach cramps. In addition, avoid drinks containing alcohol because they will actually cause you to lose more fluid.

### **Replace Salt and Minerals**

Heavy sweating removes salt and minerals from the body. These are necessary for your body and must be replaced. The easiest and safest way to replace salt and minerals is through your diet. Drink fruit juice or a sports beverage during exercise or any work in the heat. Do not take salt tablets unless directed by your doctor. If you are on a low-salt diet, ask your doctor before changing what you eat or drink-especially before drinking a sports beverage.

## **Wear Appropriate Clothing and Sunscreen**

Wear as little clothing as possible when you are at home. Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. In the hot sun, a wide-brimmed hat will provide shade and keep the head cool.

Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and causes a loss of body fluids. It also causes pain and damages the skin.

A variety of sunscreens are available to reduce the risk of sunburn. The protection that they offer against sunburn varies. Check the sun protection factor (SPF) number on the label of the sunscreen container. Select SPF 15 or higher to protect yourself adequately. Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going outdoors and reapply according to package directions.

## **Pace Yourself**

If you are unaccustomed to working or exercising in a hot environment, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, STOP all activity, get into a cool area, or at least in the shade, and rest, especially if you become lightheaded, confused, weak, or faint.

## **Stay Cool Indoors**

The most efficient way to beat the heat is to stay in an air-conditioned area. If you do not have an air conditioner or evaporative cooling unit, consider a visit to a shopping mall or public library for a few hours. Contact your local health department to see if there are any heat-relief shelters in your area. Electric fans may be useful to increase comfort and to draw cool air into your home at night, but do not rely on a fan as your primary cooling device during a heat wave. When the temperature is in the high 90s or higher, a fan will not prevent heat-related illness. A cool shower or bath is more effective way to cool off. Also, use your stove and oven less to maintain a cooler temperature in your home.

## **Schedule Outdoor Activities Carefully**

If you must be out in the heat, try to plan your activities so that you are outdoors either before noon or in the evening. While outdoors, rest frequently in a shady area. Resting periodically will give your body's thermostat a chance to recover.

## **Use a Buddy System**

When working in the heat, monitor the condition of your coworkers and have someone do the same for you. Heat-induced illness can cause a person to become confused or lose consciousness. If you are 65 years of age or older, have a friend or relative call to check on you twice a day during a heat wave. If you know anyone in this age group, check on them at least twice a day.

## **Monitor Those at High Risk**

Those at greatest risk of heat-related illness include:

- infants and children up to four years of age
- people 65 years of age or older

- people who are overweight
- people who overexert during work or exercise
- people who are ill or on certain medications

Infants and children up to four years of age are sensitive to the effects of high temperatures and rely on others to regulate their environments and provide adequate liquids. People 65 years of age or older may not compensate for heat stress efficiently, and are less likely to sense and respond to changes in temperature. Overweight people may be prone to heat sickness because of their tendency to retain more body heat. Any health condition that causes dehydration makes the body more susceptible to heat sickness. If you or someone you know is at higher risk, it is important to drink plenty of fluids; avoid overexertion; and get your doctor or pharmacist's advice about medications taken for high blood pressure, depression, nervousness, mental illness, insomnia, or poor circulation.

### **Adjust to the Environment**

Be aware that any sudden change in temperature, such as an early summer heat wave, will be stressful to your body. You will have a greater tolerance for the heat if you limit your physical activity until you become accustomed to the heat. If traveling to a hotter climate, allow several days to become acclimated before attempting any vigorous exercise, and work up to it gradually.

### **Use Common Sense**

Avoid hot foods and heavy meals—they add heat to your body. Do not leave infants, children, or pets in a parked car. Dress infants and young children in cool, loose clothing and shade their heads and faces with hats or an umbrella. Limit sun exposure during the mid-day hours and in places of potential severe exposure such as beaches. Ensure that infants and children drink adequate amounts of liquids. Give your pet plenty of fresh water, and leave the water in a shady area.

